

Trade routes and trade centres in Western Lithuania during the early Middle Ages

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The retracing of western Lithuanian trade routes is not only a question of relevance to the history of internal Baltic trade. Thus early mediaeval western Baltic internal trade routes cannot be separated from the contemporary international commercial system. Such reconstruction is possible mainly through analysing the spread of imported goods and interpreting finds from merchant graves.

However, Lithuanian routes of the early period have not been studied adequately by Lithuanian historians. We have no one published work which deals in detail with the structure of prehistoric Baltic trade routes as a whole. In studies published thus far, Lithuanian archaeologists have concentrated primarily on establishing the regional origin of imported goods and tracing the most important European trade routes (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė, 1970:87-119; Kuncienė, 1972:149-254; Kuncienė, 1981: 49-82; Vaitkunskienė, 1985: 82-94). The main feature of these studies is a concentration on the significance of water routes (rivers) and the importance of the dry routes has been neglected. In his work on Latvian trade routes, the Latvian archaeologist Ē. Mugarēvičs has argued with some credibility that the dry routes were no less significant for commercial contacts than the river networks (Mugarēvičs, 1961:80).

Among Lithuanian studies special attention should be paid to the work of V. Žulkus on Lithuanian maritime prehistory (Žulkus, 1989). This defines the Lithuanian maritime trade network in considerable detail and stresses fundamentally the significance of land routes. We should also note that, on the basis of research into the spread of wrought amber in Lithuania, R.V. Sidrys has concluded that amber from coastal districts was distributed mainly along the dry routes (Sidrys, 1994:79-80).

In discussing the early mediaeval commercial network, one cannot ignore articles devoted to the retracing of routes in the later period which are based on written sources. One of the major studies in this field is V. Biržiška's article on the routes of the Teutonic Order in the fourteenth century (Biržiška, 1933:1-54). This study is particularly valuable when read in the context of archaeological evidence.

Scholarship concerning the major commercial centres and seasonal markets is in a similar state of development. The great concentration of early mediaeval archaeological finds in western Lithuania, which illustrate trade patterns, permits speculation, that trade centres from that period should be looked for in the watersheds of the Nemunas or in coastal areas. However, owing to insuffi-

cient investigation of settlement sites, such centres cannot be named more accurately. In the past Apuolė was listed among such centres. Today researchers would add Palanga and Žardė to the list of the most important western Baltic centres (Žulkus, 1992: 46-67; Genys, 1994:80-88, Genys, 1995:108-127).

A brief survey of routes and trade centres illustrates the purpose of returning to the investigation of such matters which are of significance not only for understanding the pre-history of Lithuania but also for the analysis of trade patterns in the Baltic region as a whole.

1. Trade routes in western Lithuania

1.1. *Trade around the Baltic Sea and the localisation of trade centres in Curonian territory.*

No one can doubt the significance of the Baltic for international trade. Among the commercial centres of the eastern Baltic we can name Truso, Kaupas, Grobina. According to the findings of most recent archaeological research, Palanga and Žardė should also be added to this list. One of the bases for elevating these sites to the list of commercial and artisan centres was the suitability of their paleogeographical characteristics.

The settlement complex of early mediaeval Palanga was established right on the coast. Here along inlets or the mouth of the River Ronžė there were favourable conditions for building a port.

Žardė is a little different from Palanga and conditions there were closer to those found in Truso, Kaupas or Grobina. The centre of early mediaeval Žardė was established 4 or 5 km away from the Curisches Haff. Connection with the sea was made via the River Smiltelė and the Haff. Today the Smiltelė does not appear suited to shipping, but for the mediaeval situation we should draw attention to two points:

a. In the thirteenth century this river was called the Žardė and only later became known as the Smiltelė (Bilenstein, 1892:428,441). Linguists derive this toponym from the word *smėlis-smiltis* ("sand"), which gives an indirect indication of the silting up of the watershed of the river with sand.

b. The draught of early mediaeval vessels (cogs) sailing through the Baltic was shallow (0.5-2.25 m) (Herrmann, 1982:Tab.I) Thus, shallow draughted vessels could ply reasonably accessible rivers.

In discussing the location of these two centres, it should be stressed, that such characteristics are shared by many early mediaeval trade centres (factories) in the Baltic Region.

1.2. *The dry transit route through Lithuanian coastal districts.*

This route connected with the most important European trade network. From the Sambian peninsula it led along the Curonian Spit and through the vicinity of Klaipėda before turning towards Palanga (Fig.1). Further on it divided into two branches: one tending towards the Laiviai-Imbarė microregion via Grobina, whilst the other wended its way through less densely populated coastal zones directly to Grobina.

Archaeological evidence for the existence of the two branches of this route is not all of the same value. Least evidence comes from the Curonian Spit and there are two reasons for this shortage of material: firstly, the early mediaeval settlements of the Curonian Spit have not been excavated and secondly, the location of such sites is made difficult by frequent shifts in the local sand, and the fact that villages were built even in more modern times on the dunes. Added to these difficulties is a lack of accidental finds.

An important substantiation of the Curonian Spit's past role is provided by Curonian finds on the Sambian peninsula (Kulakov, 1994: Fig.8) A map of such finds indicates that they are concentrated largely at the junction of the Peninsula with the Spit. The sites where such artefacts have been uncovered favour the supposition that such Curonian ornaments could have travelled the long dry route along the Spit. Such hypotheses are supported by fifteenth-century written records which speak of such a route's existence (Biržiška 1933, žemėlapis; Klimas 1933:109-110).

The route from the vicinity of Klaipėda in the direction of Palanga is rich in early mediaeval archaeological monuments and finds which bear witness to trade with various regions. We should note the grave sites of Bandužiai, Laistai, Slengiai, Aukštikiemiai, Anduliai, Girkaliai, Ramučiai and Palanga where Scandinavian, western European and the odd Rus'ian finds have been unearthed (Kuncienė, 1972:240-254; Kuncienė, 1981:87-90). Here we come across glass beads which Lithuanian archaeologists traditionally associate with imports from the East and Byzantium (Kuncienė, 1981:86-87). There can be no doubt that most of the glass beads found in the sites named above are imports. However, we should also bear in mind that glass production, including the manufacture of beads was widespread in western European centres such as Ribe, Birka and such like, too. Beads have been found on Bornholm which are typologically very similar to those found in Baltic sites (Jorgensen, 1990: Pl. 26:6,28). Bornholm finds are analogous with the flat beads decorated with concentric circles which have been unearthed in Žardė. Thus, in determining the origin of one-coloured or multicoloured beads which made their way to the Baltic region, we should bear the European manufacturing centres in mind too.

According to conclusions drawn from the density of finds, the population along this route represents one of the most dynamic networks in western Lithuania (Fig.2). However, we must bear in mind that, for the most part, imports came not along the dry route but via the Baltic Sea, and spread into other districts from the coastal trade centres. Therefore the route from the Klaipėda district Palanga-wards was more important for communications between the coastal trade centres and settlements founded further inland. From Palanga the route stretched towards Lazdininkai and further on to Laiviai and Grobina (Žulkus, 1989:57). This route has been retraced according to similar archaeological finds which illustrate commercial networks. Mention should be made of a hoard of eastern coins found in Radaičiai (Dukša, 1981:93).

Moreover such small archaeological finds as the eleventh-century silver ingot hoard found at Impiltis and later written records (Dukša, 1981:100; Klimas, 1933: 109-112) allow us to suppose that there was yet another trade route between Palanga and Grobina which stuck more closely to the coast. The chronicler Herman von Wartberge mentions a wooden fortress along the course of this route.

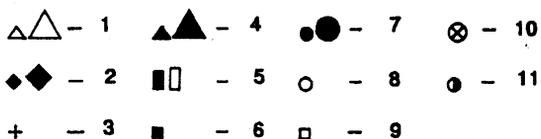
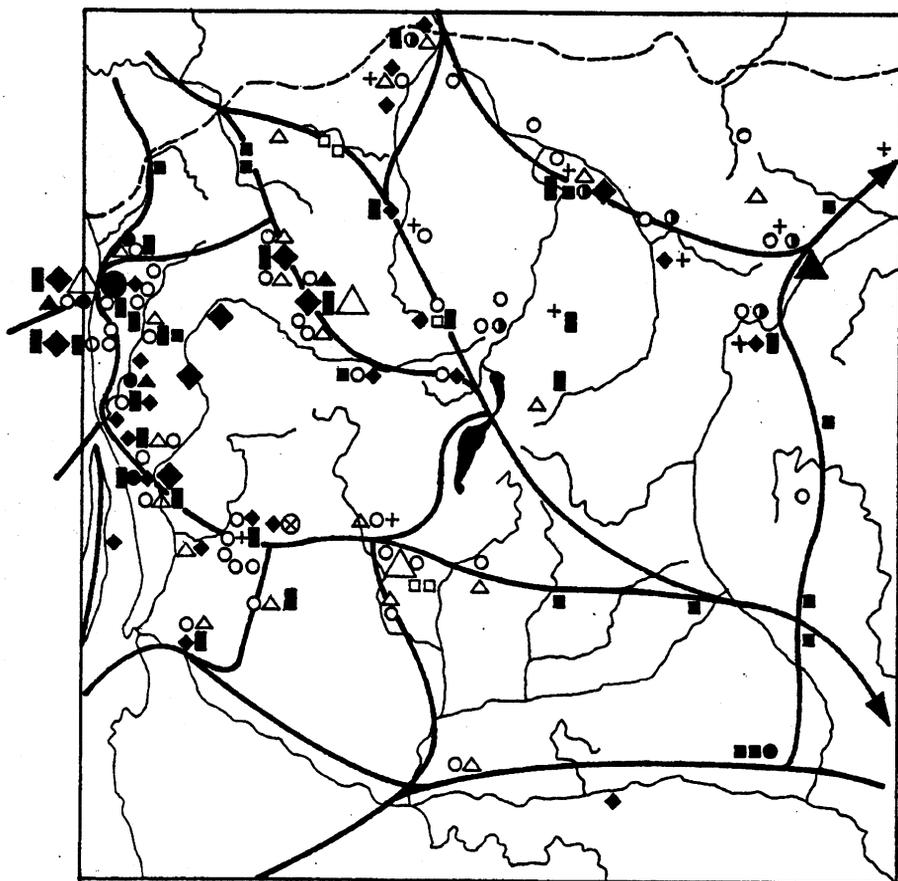
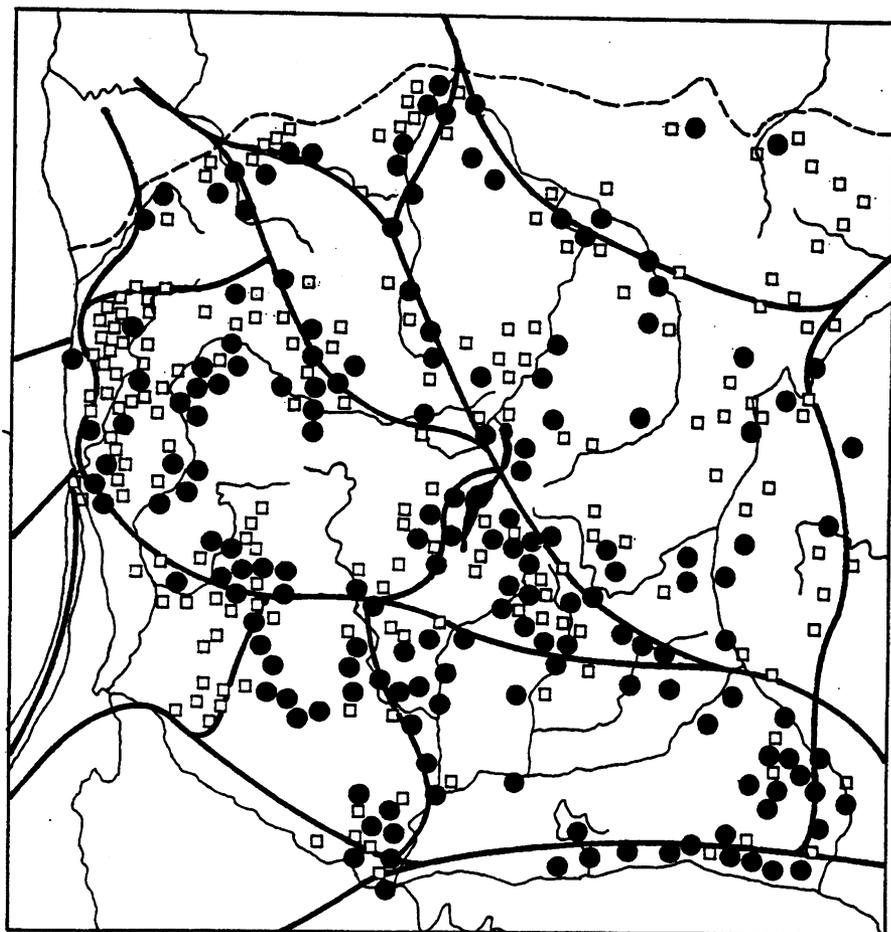


Fig. 1. Western Lithuanian Trade. 1 – West European and Scandinavian goods, 2 – weights (△ : 1-5 units, △ more than 5), 3 – Eastern Slavonic imports, 4 – Western coins and Coin hoards, 5 – scales (△ : 1-5 units, △ – more than 5), 6 – silver hoards, 7 – oriental coins and coin hoards, 8 – glass beads, 9 – hoards of bronze and iron goods, 10 – Byzantine coins, 11 – cowry shells

1.3. Routes from the Dvina and the Latvian coast to Curonian and Žemaitijan territories

Archaeological finds of imported goods permit us to distinguish the trade routes via which imports made their way through northern neighbours to the Curonian territory Keklis and to Žemaitija. The first route led from Grobina via Mosėdis to the densely populated regions of Laiviai, Imbarė and Gintališkė. Further on it turned via the edge of the western Žemaitijan uplands to Gondingen and via the Minija basin towards Akmenskinė into Central Žemaitija. This route has revealed two hoardes of silver (dated to the tenth-eleventh centuries –



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Fig. 2. Distribution of hill forts and cemeteries in the Late Iron Age (9-13 cent.). 1 - Hillforts, 2 - Cemeteries.

Mosėdis, Kusai), a thirteenth-century Lithuanian silver ingot hoard (Gondingen), Scandinavian finds (Laiviai, Imbarė, Gintališkė, Godėliai), an eleventh-century western Lithuanian coin (Gintališkė) and glass beads (Urbanavičius, 1970:77-83; Kuncienė, 1972: 211, 252; Kuncienė, 1981:69; Kuncienė, 1981: 87-90; Duksa, 1981:97).

A second route followed the Venta basin. This route divided into two branches near the confluence of the Venta and Varduva. One branch followed the eastern borders of the Curonians passing through Griežė, Dapšiai, Kukiai, Siraičiai as far as Akemnskinė before going deeper into central Žemaitija. Along this route came artefacts from the Far East (Griežė), and Rus' (Uogučiai). In several grave sites (Kukiai, Skėriai, Varduva, Siraičiai, Griežė, Akemnskinė) were found scales and weights, glass beads, and hoards from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Siraičiai) (Perkowskii, 1934:161-163; Kuncienė, 1981: 52,56; Kuncienė, 1981: 87-90; Varnas, 1984: 108-111).

Two large hoards of brass decorative pieces and iron tools were uncovered in Šliktinė (X-XII centuries) (Tautavičius, 1972: 84-85). From these we may conclude that there was yet another route branching off from Grobina towards Apuolė. Thence the route turned eastwards along the Varduva river.

A third route clearly extended along the Venta basin towards the centre point of the Šiauliai region which can be identified with the Salduvė hill fort. The Venta basin route is heavily marked by imported goods: glass beads, cowry shells – goods emanating from the Far East. From Rus' slate spindles travelled this route, as did glass bracelets. Swords came from western Europe. Along the route merchants' weights and scales have been found (Kuncienė, 1972: 192,248; Cholodinska, 1978: 178; Kuncienė, 1981:52). Also in Gudai beaten eleventh-century silver alloys have been found and near Šiauliai a western European coin hoard was discovered (Dukša, 1981: 97,102).

It is characteristic of this route that along its length almost no Scandinavian finds have been uncovered in contrast with those of Rus'ian origin, which are more numerous here than anywhere else. The Venta route linked the Curonians, Žemaitijans and in part Semigallians with the Baltic coastlands via the northern Curonian and Liv lands and the Dvina Basin (LPSRA, 1974, Att.171). From finds made along this route we may propose that there was a stronger influence of eastern imports.

Another route led from the Dvina to Šiauliai via Mažuotnė fort along the basin of the Lielupė (Mugurėvičs, 1961: 62). It led towards the centre of the Šiauliai via Sidabrava.

1.4 *Route from the Klaipėda area (Žardė) to Lamata and Žemaitija*

The basic evidence for reconstructing this route is provided by archaeological finds and mediaeval written records. The route originated in the vicinity of Klaipėda. Žardė was perhaps the starting point. Thence the route went through Stragnai to Skomantai, the centre of the Lamata territory. From Skomantai the route turned towards Švėkšna where it divided into two parts, one leading towards Kvėdarna and Paragaudis (south western Žemaitija), the other extending along the Šyša river to the settlements of southern Lamata. In fourteenth-century route descriptions compiled by the Teutonic Order (the *Wegeberichte*), the route from Klaipėda to central Žemaitija was regarded as a good one and the part from Kvėdarna to Giniotas Manor which Biržiška associates with Treigiai hill fort was called the "alte weg" (Biržiška, 1933:20).

Archaeological finds reveal that this route from the coast was in active use from the early Middle Ages. Imported goods are found in concentration in the vicinity of Skomantai (i.e. Central Lamata). Burial sites in Stragnai, Skomantai, Švėkšna, Nikėlai, Paulaičiai are rich in such finds. Among the imports are glass beads – 740 of these have been found at Stragnai (Kuncienė, 1981: 88-90). Scandinavian brooches have also been found (Stragnai, Paulaičiai), as have zoomorphic belt buckles and merchants' graves (Kuncienė, 1972: 242-245, 253). In the vicinity of this route the only Byzantine coin to have been uncovered in Lithuania was found, namely a bronze folis of emperor Nicephoras II Phocas (963-9).

1.5. The Nemunas-Jūra Route

From Žemaitijan graves excavated so far a concentration of Scandinavian imports distinguishes the sites found in the Jūra basin in southwest Žemaitija. The graves of Bikavėnai, Žašinas and Paragaudis are rich in jewelry, sword parts and glass beads whereas imported Scandinavian sword scabbard points and arrow heads are common in other south west Žemaitijan graves (Kuncienė, 1981:69-71; Vaitkunskienė, 1983:5-16; Kazakevičius, 1990: 27-29; Kazakevičius, 1992: 91-106). Traditionally it is thought that these imports reached this part of Žemaitija via the Nemunas-Jūra route.

To define this trade route we must pay attention to several factors. Most importantly the greater length of this route stretches as far as the Nemunas-Jūra confluence through the sparsely inhabited inter-tribal wildnis. Going upriver along the Nemunas, the areas around Veliuona and Seredžius are more densely populated. Secondly, despite the potential of the Nemunas as a waterway, there are very few finds of imported goods made in the areas closest to the river. A western European sword was found in Viešvilė, weights in Vilkyčiai and an Arab coin in Veliuona (Kuncienė, 1972: 242, 248, 254; Dukša, 1981:114). Amongst thirteenth century finds of significance for trade links we should mention two hoards of Lithuanian semicircular silver ingots which have been unearthed at Veliuona.

Discussing the dynamics of the Nemunas route and its significance for trade links, we should pay attention to the fourteenth-century *Wegeberichte*. These record which routes the Teutonic Order used when marching into Lithuania from three areas. One route led from Klaipėda through the centre of Lamata to Kvédarna and further on. The second came up from the Curonian Spit to Ventė and turned towards Lamata and further on in the direction of Kvédarna and Laukuva. The third route led from the south eastern end of the Spit directly to Tilsit and Ragnit and along the Jūra basin into Žemaitija (Biržiška, 1933: žemėlapis).

Having examined briefly the information provided by written records, we may return to the archaeological data, or more exactly, we must explore which routes were most likely to provide the way for imported artefacts to reach south western Žemaitija.

Obviously, the inhabitants of south western Žemaitija were interested in Scandinavian imports. Imports can be dated to the tenth-eleventh and partly to the twelfth century. The dating of the finds illustrates the link with the Baltic maritime trade network in the Viking Age.

The available sources suggest three conclusions:

1. Finds reached this region via the southern part of the Curonian Spit, the Kurisches Haff, the Nemunas delta and the Jūra river basin and thence into south eastern Žemaitija.

2. Finds reached the Kvédarna-Laukuva region via the Sambian Peninsula and the route through Tilsit and the Jūra basin.

3. Merchants brought goods into this region along the dry route which began near Klaipėda, crossed Lamata and thence went its way into Žemaitija.

Assessing these three possible routes attention should be paid to distances. As we attempt to reconstruct these routes we make the following findings. If

merchants sailed against the current they could reach Klaipėda via the Nemunas. The Jūra route to Kvėdarna makes a distance of more than 155 km. This route would pass through lightly populated territory.

If merchants were to cross the Curonian Spit at its southern extent, sail up the Nemunas and Jūra rivers (or use several means of transport), the distance would be greater – 170 km. The distance would be similar if merchants travelled the dry route from the Sambian peninsula via Tilsit and Ragnit. A third possibility would be to start from Klaipėda whence the distance to Kvėdarna would be around 55 to 60 km.

Assessing distance the best route would be that from Klaipėda via central Lamata. The frequent use of this route in the early Middle Ages is betrayed not only by the aforementioned high number of imports in Lamata, but also the distribution of finds of one particular type of buckle, namely the XI-XII century blue-tipped horseshoe buckles of Scandinavian origin which have been found in six places (Kuncienė, 1972: 215). Two of these places are in the area under discussion (Stagnai, Bikavėnai), the others, on the coast. It is possible that the sites in Lamata and south western Žemaitija support the conclusion that the dry route from Klaipėda was important for Žemaitijans living in south western Žemaitija.

Without rejecting the potential for trade exhibited by the Nemunas watershed, we should note that archaeological finds do not support the view that it was commercially important during the early Middle Ages. On the other hand, Prussian scabbard points found in Jurbarkas and Pakalniškiai confirm that there was a trade route from the Sambian peninsula to Tilsit. Similar confirmation is provided by the Linkėnai burial site near Tilsit.

1.6. Other Žemaitijan routes

It is perfectly clear that the route network in the coastal areas inhabited by Žemaitijans in the Middle Ages was much greater. As scarce archaeological finds and remarks in written sources show the route from Kvėdarna-Paragaudis divided into two branches. One branch traversed well known sites such as Tverai, Parėpilis and at Varniai joined up with the road leading from Akmenskynė and the Betygala area. This route led to Kraėiai. In the fourteenth century the route from Tverai to Varniai and thence to Lake Parėsas, and from Varniai to Kraėiai was regarded as a good one (LKA, 1983:15).

From Kraėiai via the outskirts of Raseiniai the route led to Betygala and further on into central Lithuania. Around Raseiniai there has been found an eleventh-century silver jewelry hoard which supports this theory, albeit rather weakly (Urbanavičius, 1970:77-83). There are very few archaeological finds which bear witness to the existence of this route.

Another route from Paragaudis-Kvėdarna led via Žaėinas and Kaltinėnai to Betygala. In the *Wegeberichte* this road is also classed as good. In its sphere of influence we find X-XI and XI-XIII century artefacts at Kutimai and Jucaiėiai (LAA, 1977:131-132). At Žviliai the route probably turned towards Geguėė hillfort, named in fourteenth-century sources. Upyna and Paeėzeris burial sites have been excavated in this area where considerable Scandinavian imports have been found (arrow heads from the VIII-IX centuries), glass beads and XII-XIII century silver ingots and jewelry (Skaudivilė) (Kuncienė, 1972:254; Kuncienė, 1981: 89; Duksa,

1981: 112-113). Thus we may conclude that this route went towards Raseiniai and Betygala and on into Central Lithuania.

According to R. Batūra, in the early Middle Ages one route network linked the centre of the Šiauliai territory with Central Žemaitija (Batūra, 1986:9), but there is a lack of archaeological evidence for reconstructing the route in greater detail. The link from Salduvė hill fort to Bubiai is more easily retraced. Glass beads, cowry shells, slate spindles and merchants' grave clothes have been found in graves in Jakštaičiai Meškiai (Urbanavičius, 1977:129-134; LAA, 1987:133-134; Urbanavičius, 1984: 93-95). Apart from imported finds from eastern Slavonic and far eastern countries, the influence of the Semigallians (neighbours to the Žemaitijans) can be sensed here.

The extent of this route past Bubiai is not altogether clear. It is very probable that one route went to the south (to Betygala and Derbutai). It is here that routes from coastal central Žemaitija, the Nemunas Basin and Aukštaitijan centres crossed. E. Gudavičius located the estates of the thirteenth century Žemaitijan princeling Erdvilas in this area (Gudavičius, 1989:32).

Thus, the route network along which imports made their way from the Baltic and more distant points (via the Baltic) to Curonian, Žemaitijan and Aukštaitijan centres was not very taxing. The sites of finds from Scandinavia, the Near East, western Europe reveal that first and foremost Lamata and the Curonian, Žemaitijan and Semigallian tribes (the latter two to a lesser degree) felt the influence of Baltic (Viking) trade. In central Lithuania the impact of that region was much weaker.

Precise archaeological data support the conclusion that one part of the imports reached western Lithuania via Prussian territory, another (larger) part via Curonia and a third from the Dvina area.

2. Trade centres of Western Lithuania

The large-ish settlements at Palanga and Žardė should be mentioned first among the commercial centres which can be located along the Baltic coast (Fig.3). A series of articles has examined the character of this area in closer detail (Žulkus, 1992: 46-67; Žulkus, 1995:190-206; Genys, 1994:80-88; Genys, 1995:108-127). How do these places differ from other early mediaeval west Lithuanian settlements, and what are the reasons for classifying them among trade and artisan centres of the proto urban type?

1. They are suitable places in the network of European waterways and land trade routes.

2. These places reached their furthest extent in the early Middle Ages and occupied an area of up to 10-12 ha. According to modern research these were the largest settlements in western Lithuania.

3. Their structures are similar. These settlements spread around a small hillfort whose size was only 10x17 m (Palanga), 35 x 55 m. (Žardė), which were strengthened by earthworks and a wooden palisade. Sites comprising separate unconnected areas, spread on flat hillocks, surrounded by marshland and other difficult waterlands. Structurally, they are similar to such well known trade centres as Volyn, Gdańsk, Birka.

4. Separately constructed settlement sites have their own characteristics. The section of Palanga near Birutė's Hill and Žemaičių Kalnelis are defined as

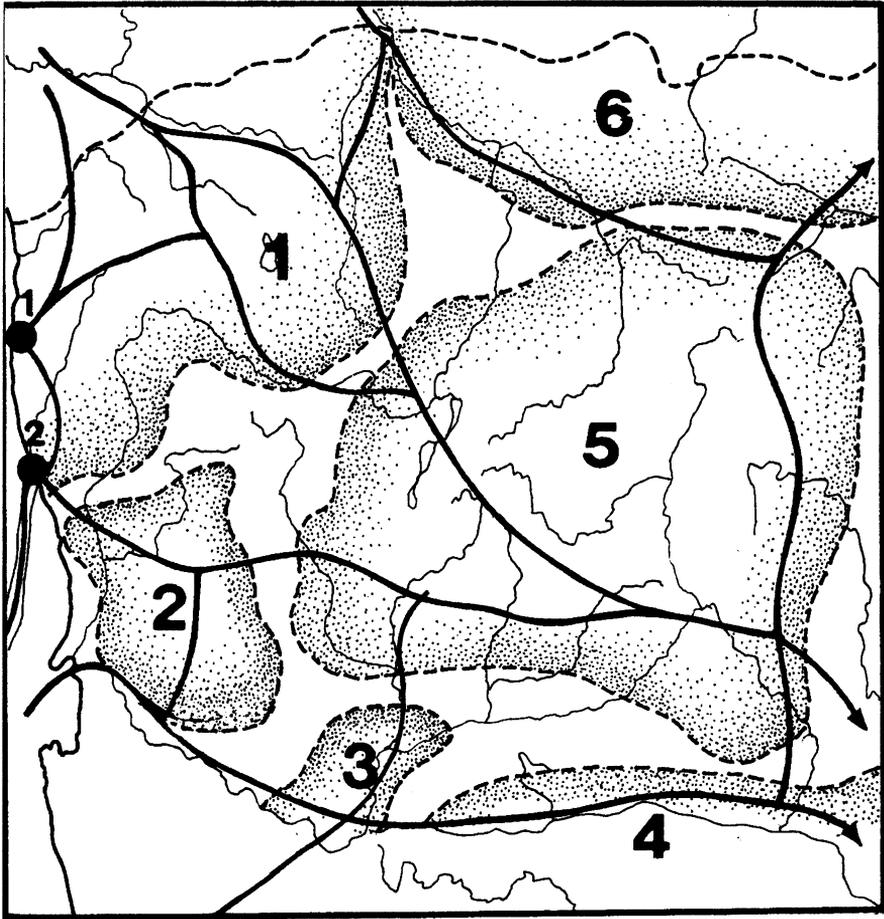


Fig. 3. Trade routes and trade centres in Western Lithuania: 1 – Palanga, 2 – Žardė. 1 – curonian territory, 2 – Lamata, 3 – Skalvian territory, 4 – Aukštaitijans, 5 – Žemaitijans, 6 – Semigallians

multicultural mercantile dwelling areas. Among these a large part (around seven hectares in size), which was surrounded by marshes, is notable for its local Curonian cultural attributes and its connections with the local inhabitants.

The central part of Žardė, about eight hectares in area, is typified not only by multicultural characteristics, but also by its division into subareas according to various artisan occupations.

5. The material culture of these settlements is typified by its multicultural nature. In addition to local Curonian finds, here we come across (especially in the Curonian graves found in Palanga and Bandužiai) a good quantity of artefacts classifiable as Scandinavian, west European or western Slavonic manufacture, or being from places influenced culturally by these centres. This archaeological material is dominated by western Slavonic pottery. In the earliest cultural layers of Žardė, datable to the ninth and tenth centuries, we find thin-sided ceramics with bands of small rings and these are regarded as imports. Later examples were made locally but these exhibit western Slavonic ceramic traits and decorations.

In Palanga there have been finds of clay loom weights with stamped decorations which are untypical of Baltic culture and these can be connected with Germanic lands. An analogous loom weight has been found in Žardė but this lacks decoration.

Among the imported goods we should place the flat glass beads found in the Žardė settlement area. The closest analogy can be found on Borholm. Dwelling constructions should also be regarded as a feature of the site's polyethnic composition. In the early mediaeval dwelling site at Palanga we find framework constructions with compressed clay dome-shaped ovens and clay floors. Analogous construction forms reveal the influence of the western Slavs and Latgallians.

On the western edge of the Žardė dwelling area, by the street we also come across framework constructions where ovens were built bearing a stone dome over a largeish pit (1,5-1,8 m. in diameter, 0,5 m. deep). Such ovens are rare in the Baltic area and the closest analogy can be found in Prussia (Kulakov, 1990:14). The aforementioned remains of untraditional buildings were found in the southern extremity of the Žardė dwelling site. Here we come across fragments of carefully cut rectangular posts stripped of offshoots. Near these remains there are clay marks, beaten clay dome and a stone oven. From the available evidence we should classify these building remains as being of the Viking type which is found not only in Scandinavia and England but also in trade centres along the southern Baltic littoral.

6. Archaeological finds from the dwelling sites in Palanga and Žardė and their associated burial areas reveal the professional variety of the artisans who dwelt here. In Žardė lived metal workers, blacksmiths, jewellers, amber workers, weavers and, perhaps, glass jewelry (bead) makers. The manufacture of glassware may be supposed from bits of glass and fragments of defective beads which were found during excavation. Similar diversity amongst artisans is typical too of Palanga in the early Middle Ages. According to the calculations of V. Žukus who excavated the area, during the growth period in the development of Palanga in the eleventh century only circa 22% of the inhabitants were engaged in agriculture. Thus the remaining people were engaged in non-agricultural activity. The same scholar calculated from eleventh-century burial evidence that around 11-12% of the townsfolk were connected with trade.

From Bandužiai graves we know that in this site merchants made up 4-5% of the population.

7. The graves of wealthy, well-armed men reveal that military activities played an important part in local life. Graves found without gravegoods are treated as typical of the presence of slaves.

3. Seasonal markets in western Lithuania

Written sources and a whole line of researchers stress, that in the early Middle Ages seasonal markets were held very often on the borders of tribal areas (LIZ, 1955:21; Nermann, 1929:160, Okulicz-Kozaryn, 1983:199-201). Sites were selected which were suitable for people from neighbouring tribes and lands.

Because of a lack of sufficient archaeological evidence, the question of seasonal trade centres has not been explored by Lithuanian archaeologists. In

this article I wished to stress that a part of west Lithuanian burial sites which are far from the sea, but situated along the major trade routes, are rich in grave goods (e.g. Gintališkė) and imports. First of all, attention should focus on the Stragnai graves. There alone more than 740 glass and enamel beads, merchants' scales and measures, imported artefacts were found. However, there is not known to have been a hill fort or settlement in this area. Such characteristics lead us to regard Stragnai as a possible seasonal trade site. Its geography is suitable: the graves are found in the north western edge of Lamata, near the route from Klaipėda leading to south western Žemaitija. Similar characteristics are enjoyed by Pavirvytė-Gudai in the western border of Semigallian tribal land. There may have been even more such trade sites. Further research should be devoted to Gintališkė's place in the structure of other early mediaeval settlement sites. There could have been another such market site or trade centre from which imports spread through surrounding districts in the neighbourhood of Kvėdarna-Paragaudis.

Conclusions

1. Investigation of imports and of merchant graves shows that at the end of the first millennium and during the opening centuries of the second, the Baltic tribes established in western Lithuania enjoyed quite close contacts with centres of international trade.

2. Retracing the trade routes allows discussion of a network of optimal routes, which permitted contacts to be maintained through central settlement sites within the region, and provided conditions for the acquisition of trade goods from centres in western and northern Europe and the Near East. The spread of imported goods illustrates how the Curonians and south western Žemaitijans felt the effect of Baltic trade centres, and western Semigallians, northern Žemaitijans enjoyed stronger contacts with their eastern neighbours (eastern Slavs, arabs). This link was made via the Dvina trade route.

3. Trade and artisan centres founded on the Baltic coast had very important significance for the the international trade connections of the western Žemaitijans. In their dwelling areas Palanga and Žardė exhibit the characteristics of proto-urban centres. They played a role as intermediaries in trade between the Balts and, primarily, the Germanic peoples, and the western Slavs, and acted as a commercial catalyst in the western Baltic region.

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Prekybos keliai Vakarų Lietuvoje ansktyvaisiais viduramžiais

JONAS GENYS

Santrauka

Dauguma Lietuvos archeologų, tyrinėjusių prekybinius ryšius, savo dėmesį koncentravo į tarptautinės prekybos kelius, o aptardami vietines tranzito trasas akcentavo vandens (upių) svarbą. Latvių tyrinėjimai, naujausi Lietuvoje pasirodę darbai verčia manyti, kad prekybiniai kontaktai didžia dalimi (o gal ir didžiausia dalimi) buvo realizuojami sausumos ar mišriais (sausumos-vandens) keliais.

Vėlyvajame geležies amžiuje (ypač X-XII a.) baltų gentys dabartinėje Lietuvos teritorijoje nevienodai aktyviai dalyvavo ir jautė prekybinius kontaktus. Daugiausia importo, pirklių kapų, užfiksuota Vakarų Lietuvoje ir ypač kuršių genties teritorijoje. Kaip rodo dirbinių tipai, kuršiai, pietvakariniai žemaičiai labiausiai iš kitų genčių jautė Baltijos prekybos sistemos įtaką. Tam svarbų vaidmenį suvaidino ir Lietuvos pajūryje egzistavę centrai – Palanga ir Žardė, per kurias atvežtos prekės, žaliava ir iš jos pagaminti dirbiniai paplito į kitų genčių teritorijas.

Importas žiemgalių, šiaurinių žemaičių teritorijoje leidžia išskirti prielaidą, kad šis baltų regionas tampriau buvo surištas su Dauguvos prekybos keliu, kuriuo pateko Rytų slavų, Arabų kraštų dirbiniai.

Importuotų archeologinių dirbinių kartografavimas, archeologinės medžiagos vertifikavimas su turimomis rašytinėmis žiniomis leidžia rekonstruoti tokias pagrindines prekybinių kelių kryptis krašto viduje:

1. Sambijos pusiasalis – Kuršių nerija – Klaipėdos apylinkės (Žardė?) – Palanga – Laivių-Imbarės regionas – Grobinės kryptimi.

2. Ši trasa vedė nuo Latvijos pajūrio (Grobinės) pro Mosėdį, Laivius – Imbarę – Godingą – Akmenskinę į Centrinę Žemaitiją ir toliau Betygalos kryptimi.

3. Šis kelias praėjo Ventos baseinu ties Ventos–Varduvos santaka šakojosi dviem kryptimis: viena – pro Griežę, Siraičius, Akmenskinę, kita vedė į Šiaulių žemės centrą – Salduvos pilį.

4. Šis kelias prasidėjo Klaipėdos apylinkėse (nuo Žardės?) ir vedė į Lamatos žemės centrą Skomantus, toliau Kvėdarnos-Paragaudžio kryptimi.

5. Istoriografijoje dažnai akcentuojamas Nemuno-Jūros kelias. Nemuno žemupio kaip svarbiausio prekybos trakto vertinimas kelia abejonių. Neatmetant galimybės, kad tokia trasa ankstyvaisiais viduramžiais egzistavo, labiau tikėtina, kad importas į pietvakarinę Žemaitiją pateko mūsų paminėtu keliu pro Lamatą arba keliu vedusiu iš Sambijos pusiasalio link Nemuno-Jūros santakos.

6. Rekonstruoti kitus Žemaitijos kelius dėl duomenų stokos sudėtinga. Neausūs archeologiniai radiniai, vėlyvesni rašytiniai šaltiniai leidžia manyti, kad vienas kelias iš Kvėdarnos apylinkių pro Tverus, Paršpilį vedė link Varnių ir įsijungė į kelią ėjusį iš Akmenskinės Betygalos link. Kita trasa galėjo kirsti Žašną, Kaltinėnus, Betygalos kryptimi.